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ABSTRACT: Vietnamese has to face with cross-culture issue with the teaching and learning English as Vietnamese culture is 'villagers culture' which consider relationship in village as family relations and an emphasis "on hierarchical, social order in their dealings with one other" (Ellis, 1995: 9) with a traditional teaching method which is teacher - centered, book - centered, grammar - translation method and an emphasis on rote memory (Liu & Little Wood, 1997), English which belongs to Western culture, stands in the opposite side. This paper aims at a deep looking into Vietnamese culture to find out how this culture influence on learning and teaching foreign language and in this case it is English. Consequently, the differences between cultures can reduce the effectiveness of learning and teaching activity. Therefore, both learners and teachers should be aware of these distinctive features to help themselves overcome cultural barriers in learning and teaching process with the best achievement. The paper contains 01 table.

KEYWORDS: learning and teaching English, Vietnam, cross-culture, influence.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Unquestionably, in the line with globalization which is the widespread trend nowadays, English is becoming global language. It leads to the need of teaching and learning this international language everywhere in the whole world. However, no one can deny that language and culture cannot be separate from our daily lives (Maley, 1996). It means that language - the most important communication tool of human - plays an essential role in the perpetuation of culture (Kramsch, 2000). Language is one part which contributes in forming culture of one community and cultural factor presents in all aspect of language communication. Therefore, 'different cultural traditions do embody different attitudes to knowledge' (Ballard and Clanchy, 1997: 9) and this forms variety of Englishes, for example, Singlish (English of Singaporean). With the same way of thinking, Pennycook (1997) also supposes that language needs to be understood within the particular context in which it is used.

The decision of learning and teaching language also means that Vietnamese have to face with cross-culture issue. Meanwhile, Vietnamese culture is villagers culture (Tran, Ngoc Them, 1994) or rice culture (Huard & Durand, 1990), which consider relationship in village as family relations and an emphasis "on hierarchical, social order in their dealings with one other" (Ellis, 1995: 9) with a traditional teaching method which is teacher - centered, book - centered, grammar - translation method and an emphasis on rote memory (Liu & Little Wood, 1997), English which belongs to Western culture, stands in the opposite side. This feature causes difficulties not only for learners but also for teachers who both directly involve in learning and teaching English.

This paper aims at a deep looking into Vietnamese culture to find out how this culture influence on learning and teaching foreign language and in this case it is English. As a result, once we have

knowledge about this matter, we will find the best way to fit into Vietnamese culture at the same time achieving English proficiency as wishing.

Firstly, I will have an overview on language and culture as a starting. The next part will be the Vietnamese culture background as basic leading knowledge to help us a clear understanding of cultural factors. The third part is a deeper look into Vietnamese educational context, specifically the relationship between teachers and learners. Then I will present the effecting of these features on learning and teaching English which I am sure that will explain 'pulling-hair matter' of many people. Last but not least, I will give some suggestions which I hope will be helpful in certain point.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW.

1. Overview on culture and language.

Culture

Pauwells and others (1998) confirms that culture is and essential part of human social life of the way that people live together in groups and is shared by members of a social group and passed on from generation to generation. In other word, culture is the preservation and release of knowledge of the history and achievements of countries (Papademetre and Scarino, 2000: 33).

Culture is defined differently in different points of view. With behaviorists, they believe culture consisting of “observable phenomena” such as ways of cooking, forms of dress or way of greeting. And culture is:

“any of the customs, world view, language, kinship system, social organization, and other take-for-granted day-to-day practices of a people which set that group apart as a distinctive group.” (Scollon and Scollon, 1995: 126).

However, anthropologists do not totally agree with this definition as they see culture in a larger view. With them, culture also includes shared beliefs, values and ideologies which are not directly observable in human social life. Approaching culture with cognitive approach, Saville-Troike (1982) defines culture: “culture is what the individual needs to know to be a functional member of the community”(pp. 8). It means that culture tends primarily to the sharing of knowledge (including beliefs and values) sometimes to the exclusion of actual behaviour.

It is necessary to know that culture changes when the living conditions change as knowledge and behaviours, which are parts of culture, do not remain static. The other two factors which contribute to the dynamism of culture are culture’s contact with another groups’ culture and language structure, language uses.

Language

Communication is one of the most important activities of human being and language is one of the most powerful and prevalent means of communication systems (such as music, dance, gestures, language, etc.). Definition of Lewis (1990) shows that language is a tool of communication releasing information but it is much more than that, it has strengths and weakness, which plan national character and philosophy. As in Pauwells and other (1998: 9) : “communication through language (spoken, written or signed) can only take place when the

communication partners know and share the rules for combining sounds, graphic symbols, or sign into acceptable and recognizable words and the rules on conventions for combining words into sentences and longer texts”. Because, people are living in different values, norms or cultural traditions, the language people use will be linked to and shaped by their social and cultural practices. And again, like culture, language is not static. They change in lexicon, grammar, pronunciation, spelling, signing or even the use of language. According to these authors, language consists of 6 functions: medium of communication, means of identification, a symbol of identity, means of cognitive development, instrument of action and major tool in the construction and transmission of culture. Cythia & Victor (1997) also have the same idea that language is an excellent medium for transmitting cultural values.

Knowing a language is not only knowing the units of language and how to connect them to construct meanings but also knowing how to use language promptly in a wide range of contexts.

Relationship between language and culture

Most of people agree that language and culture have a very close relationship because the system of language is a part of the shared cultural knowledge and social groups, and ways of communicating are an important part of the observable behaviour of people in social groups. Culture is proscriptive and it tells people how to behave within their group. Therefore, the way people speak indicates their sex, age, social class, place of residence, and information about their religion, job and taste. Brick (1991) points out that culture and language connected with each other, so that learning language means learning culture and vice versa. It means that in learning how to speak, a child must not only master the vocabulary and grammar of a certain language, he

must also receive the social rules that control how he ought to use his vocabulary and grammar in specific situations. Normally, while moving from culture to another, people take their worldview with them. This informs their solution of the new situations they experience so that the solutions they reach are frequently inappropriate.

As the hypothesis of two Americans named Whorfian and Sapir-Whorf, there has an extreme view that language creates culture. This view is part of the notion of “linguistic determinism” which indicates the way that we think is determined by the language we speak. In contrast, there is an opposite extreme that “language only reflects culture and can have no role in creating culture, or limiting the way we think” (Pauwells & others, 1998: 12). Nowadays, most linguists would agree that it is impossible to prove that language determines the way we think on the one hand or that it only reflects it on the other hand.

“The fact that any concept can be expressed in any language is good evidence to show that culture is not restricted by language. The fact that many concepts cannot be easily expressed in many languages is good evidence to show that language often closely reflects culture, and that the relationship between language and culture is one of interdependence” (Pauwells & others, 1998: 13).

2. Some features of Vietnamese culture

2.1 Collectivism

There is a significant difference exists in educational situations in individualist and collectivist cultures. As other collectivism culture, in Vietnam homes and schools, the children are expected to take their opinions from others and to go along with what is best for the group. In other words, collectivism cultures are group-oriented (Gudykunst, 1991: 93). Collectism refers to a value

system in which a person's identity, attitudes and actions are determined to a large degree by the groups to which he or she belongs, especially so-called "in-groups" with which there is regular and close interaction (e.g. those based on family ties on, in some societies, the working unit). A person does not claim rights which would affirm individual interests in opposition to those of in-groups (Kim et. al., 1994 and Triandis, 1995). Vietnamese usually use 'we' as personal pronouns when starting a personal idea. They feel more comfortable working as a team member (Burns, 1998: 11).

In contrast with individualism cultures "confrontation can be salutary; a clash of opinions is believed to lead to a higher truth" (Hofstede, 1991), even reward for excellence also goes to the group and responsibility for performance is owed to the group. Even the choice of study and occupation is a group decision rather than a personal one. Interdependence is always important and goes between and is relied upon (McLaren, 1998: 167). Moreover, keeping a good relationship is very important and it is even more important than success. "If success eluded you this time, you can always try again if the relationship is intact." (Varner and Beamer, 1995 in McLaren, 1998). Individuals define their identity by their relationships to others, through group membership, and strive for a sense of belonging. Schneider (1997: 38) gave an interesting example about the two cultures (collectivism and individualism): In Japan, ostracism is the most devastating punishment. This is evident of the fear of Japanese children of being locked out of the house; while for American children, punishment is being locked in.

One of the features which have great influence on education is that decisions are often based on means, not ends. All decisions about career and tertiary study fields are made by family, not

individuals. Students may have their fees and living expenses paid by their extended families. The assumption is that they will always return to their homes and when they do all the family will share in a greater income the graduate can then earn.

2.2 Face saving

No matter where you are, inside or outside classroom, face saving is important in the knowing and learning process. Face is a universal phenomenon because everyone would like to be respected; everyone needs a sense of self-respect but the importance of face is far greater in Asian cultures where behaviour and relationship focus on maintaining, saving, or honouring face for the group. Saving face becomes important to reserve harmony; there is more concern with feelings than absolute facts.

As in Ting-Toomey (1988) in Gudykunst (1991), face is defined as the public self-image. And in collectivistic culture as Vietnam, the concern for face is predominately other-oriented. However, to Asian face is a mutual concept, for giving face means allowing room for the other person to recover their face. The issue of giving face, especially to people with higher status, is important in collectivistic cultures. According to Burns (1998: 16), most Asian people understand how much face they have; to have a greater face implies they are more powerful in organizations or know more people in the system. They learn how to deal with higher people (greater face); and with subordinates (lesser face) who handle many of the job details and are influential. Face is always inseparable from the 'webs of relationship' in Asian cultures. In a sense everyone is interlocked in the group face. That is one of the reason why Vietnamese student are accustomed to listening to the teachers and accepting what s/he says and it is difficult for students to ask

question in class. They are afraid of losing face and also afraid of causing the teacher to lose face as though disagreeing with what he or she says is adverse criticism, implying that the teacher is less than perfect. One way to avoid that is Vietnamese students will try to ask in private afterwards or rather ask their classmates.

2.3 High context

The context level refers to how much you have before effective communication can occur. Collectivist cultures belong to high context and individualist cultures belong to low context. In high context culture like Vietnam, they have a lot of implicit meaning in what is said, using a shared code, concentrating on group orientations and stressing nonverbal communication. Members of high context culture tend to use an indirect style of speech because the image of group harmony is essential (Gudykunst, 1991:96). They want to know others' status and background in order to reduce uncertainty and know which version of the language to use (as there are different ways to speak to people who are superiors, equals or inferiors). With the same ideas, Triandis (Personal communication, 1990 in Gudykunst, 1991: 50) points out that:

"since in collectivist cultures relationships with others are extremely important, people learn to pay attention not only to what is said, but also to the context of what is said - the gestures, the orientation of the body, the objects associated with what is being said. In other words, they pay more attention to context than people in individualistic cultures."

People in high context cultures seem to make greater distinction between insiders and outsiders than low context cultures do. When they talking about something in mind, they expect the

interlocutors to know what's bothering them, so that they do not have to be specific. They just talk around the point and putting all pieces in place except the crucial one. They suppose that their interlocutor will place it properly. Ambiguity and subtlety are expected and highly valued. You are not supposed to come tight out and say it. This creates embarrassment and discomfort (Hall, 1976: 98).

McLaren (1998: 164) points out, in high context cultures open conflict is almost always destructive as Confucian, Taoist and Buddhist philosophy all oppose debate and confrontation. Any interaction resulting in discord means one or all lose "face". All the conflict should be supposed, not talk out. Students' questions and teacher disapproval will be indirect, accommodating, worded to ensure no face is lost. In Vietnam as well as other collectivist culture, everything base on the basic rule: "Honour the hierarchy first, your vision of truth second" (Bond, 1991: 83).

Gudykunst (1991:52) summarize high context cultures' features and compare with low context cultures features as follow:

High context	Low context
Most of the information is contained in the person/situation.	Most of the information is contained in the message.
Easier when population are homogenous.	Necessary when populations are heterogeneous.
More typical of traditional societies and/or stable situations.	More typical of changing situations and societies.

Verbal communication shorter, indirect, ambiguous, less detailed.	Verbal communication direct, instrumental, detailed.
Silence is valued s more credible.	Silence not trusted.
Direct questioning discouraged.	Direct questioning necessary
Open conflict discouraged as damaging to communication and harmony.	Direct conflict essential to arrive at truth, not necessarily damaging to good communication.
Greater emphasis on intuition and reading nonverbal behaviour, and contextually appropriate ways to maintain relationships.	Greater emphasis on clarity, meaning, achieving ends rather than on relationships.

2.4 Vietnamese communication practices:

Once of the most important feature of Vietnamese communication practices is the differentiation between ingroup and outgroup members. Ingroup members are the people have close relationship, same value system, cultural standards, symbols and beliefs. Ingroup members are considered as "I" or "we" and are behaves as "members of the family". On the other hand, outgroup members are strangers who seems to not have "the same voice" or "on the same boat". Vietnamese tend to treat them in a safe and effective way as "honor guest."

The agreement and the hierarchy is the crucial part in communication within members of ingroup. All members volunteer to follow the conformism. Behaviour should base on propriety and formals which were agreed before is considered ad communication standard. The outstanding, strange or new behaviours are not encouraged (even be critcized) as it has influence on community or group. All people who take part in the communication process do not dare and

do not have chances to change the hierarchy positions or the roles in communication. Members try to avoid conflict which cause face-losing within group. Communication among ingroup members usually has the colour of feeling, compromise and open. This is one of behaviour rule in communication of Vietnamese. With outgroup members, Vietnamese of ten have two communication practices: saving face for the whole group and hesitate when communicates as individual. When Vietnamese communicate as group or on behalf of group, the face of group is considered as the first priority. As in Le (2003: 253) members of ingroups want to be seen as a united group with high agreement in all activities or sayings. When talking part in communication as an individual, Vietnamese tend to "hold their mouth". In other words, they seem to not express their real feeling and try to be modest through using personal pronouns (always self-address as lesser face). This strategy is usually used when Vietnamese has not to understand about their interlocutors in order to ensure the safety of their individual face.

3. Vietnamese education background

Vietnam was dominated for a long time by more than one nation. Therefore, Vietnamese culture also was influenced, especially from Chinese culture. According to Nguyen (2003: 124), we can see anywhere with “worship Confucianism, venerate Taoism” and that was an elemental moral lesson for all students in feudal time. Even now, most schools have slogan “Tien hoc le, hau hoc van” (Learn social propriety first, after that learning lesson). The position of teachers was equal with the position of the King or father “Vua, thay, cha ay ba ngoi - Kinh tho nhu mot, tre oi ghi long” (The King, the teacher, the father occupy three different positions; but children remember that you should venerate them equally as one unified person) (Phuoc, 1975: 106). The aim of education in Vietnam is to educate people to become good citizens in both knowledge and

morality. Teachers themselves are thus automatically assumed to be moral guides or role of models (the Constitution of Vietnam, the Education Law of Vietnam). It is often believe that teachers tend to develop themselves both in knowledge and morality to meet the social, cultural and educational expectations as moral guides. As such, teachers in Vietnam

Or teacher was considered as children's parents "Mung mot Tet cha, mung hai Tet me, mung ba Tet thay" (Visit father at the first day of the New Year, visit mother at the second day of the New Year, and visit teacher at the third day of the New Year). It means that students should show their respect to their teachers (Ellis, 1995). As a result, teacher should share the responsibility for the learning result of students. Today, teachers have the same responsibility for students' result at the end of school year, especially with teachers in high school because their students are going to take part in the two biggest exams (final exam and university entrance exam). The learning routine does not change much from the past until now. In the past, students had to pass three levels of exams: huong (communally), hoi (provincially) and dinh (nationally) which happen every three years. People seems to think that earning high ranking on those exams is the only way to get honour for their families and to become mandarin instead of being a poor student with low social status. And now, students still go through the same way to get to the highest level as national excellent students in specific subjects every year. And those who get pass can go directly to the university they like without having entrance exams.

The education system is absolutely teacher-centred, closed, non-feedback and applicable to conformist (Phuoc, 1975 in Ellis, 1995). Overtime, when Vietnamese shift from feudalism to socialism, the influence of Confucianism seemed to decrease on education system. They change

language from Chinese alphabet to “chu quoc ngu” (Latin language). Before 1995, education system in Vietnam operated with variety of models such as Soviet model (in the North), American model (in the South), French model (both in the North and the South) which show its eclecticism. In Tran (1998: 291), he shows the significant characteristic of Vietnamese lifestyle is the flexibility in the way it is open to new values, selecting aspects that are suitable with the local culture and applying those new values into appropriate contexts. This is one of the important “culture constant” constituting the current Vietnamese education system (Tran, Quoc Vuong, 2003: 278).

4. The relationship between teachers and learners.

In their work, Ballard and Clanchy 1997: 9) argue that: “different cultural traditions do embody different attitudes to knowledge. After more than 1,000 years of Chinese domination, Vietnamese cultural value, especially the nature of education in Vietnam is affected by Confucian system of ethics (Nguyen, 1972). Learning styles of Vietnamese also based on three key Confucian values: cooperation, the concept of "face" and self-effacement (Flowerdew, 1998).

Phuoc (1975) realize Confucian model is teacher-centred, closed, suspicious of creativity and predicate on an unquestioning obedience from the students. If the students fail to comply, teacher will actively inhibit the students' creativity. On the other hand, students might reverse their own opinions to save the face of the teacher, even when they are aware that the teacher is wrong. Liu & Littlewood (1997) once again confirm that most English teaching in East-Asia countries is dominated by a teacher-centred, grammar-translation method and emphasis on rote memory. As

application of teacher-centred method, students highly respect their teachers and they consider teachers as the transmitter of knowledge. Vietnamese teachers provide all details of the lesson and all learners have to do is absorbing those knowledge. As Hofstede (1991), communities with strong uncertainty-avoidance, learners expect their teachers to know. Therefore, Vietnamese education is dependent learning, not independent study. Bodycatt & Walker (2004: 88) quotes idea which shows the same thought from one Vietnamese teacher:

“Another related issue was the perceived status of academic staff and reluctant student expectations. The students in our classes seemed to view us, as teachers, as the fonts of all knowledge and to accept what we told them without question. Very few students seemed willing to question any of the ideas we presented in lectures either in classroom or individual settings. We found it somewhat daunting that the general expectation of students was that we have the answer to all questions.”

Vietnamese teachers valued hard work, which they measure partly in terms of the amount of studying done outside class (Lewis & McCook, 2002). Therefore, the model “pairs of good students” is very popular in Vietnam. The good students are assigned to help bad students both inside and outside classroom to help them make progress. This also reflects sense of community of Vietnamese which relates to “the Confucian notion of mutual obligation and membership in a group” (Nguyen, 1973 and Nguyen 1989 as cited in Sullivan, 1996: 34). Influenced by traditional educational objective “Tien hoc le, hau hoc van” (Learn social propriety first, after that learn the lesson), “the role of morality in teacher identity and the teaching profession in Vietnam reflect its local relevance, morality has long been an indispensable and inseparable part of education in Vietnam” (Phan, H. and Phan, Q., 2006). Generally, it is believed that parents give the child its

body, the teacher give it its mind (Brick & Louie, 1984: 41). Teachers are considered as models for students to follow.

In the Constitution of Vietnam- The Education Law of Vietnam states that teachers themselves are thus automatically assumed to be moral guides or role models. Therefore, teachers in Vietnam often find it necessary and important to educate students morally, no matter what subject they teach (Phan, H. & Phan, Q., 2006: 136).

5. How these cultural features affecting on teaching and learning English in Vietnam and some recommendations.

Firstly, the typical characteristic of Vietnamese which have influence on learning is the hesitation and shyness. As Duong, Diller and Sutherland (1975: 126) states:

“According to Vietnamese custom, one should remain modest and humble, showing the extent of knowledge or skills only when asked. In Vietnam, there is the motto of saying less than what one actually knows, often and admirable characteristic. Modesty and humility for Vietnamese are very important social graces, and deeply ingrained into their identity”.

Besides, as Tomlinson & Bao Dat (2004) find out “one student started a little but correctly is more important than verbalizing a lot but wrongly, and attitude that came from many of her teachers in the past who had paid much emphasis on perfection. This coincides with Lewis & McCook (2002: 147) view that verbal perfection has been traditionally valued across many Asian cultures. This makes learners are rather quiet in class and seldom volunteer to express their

ideas or to contribute to the lesson, let alone asking question to the teachers. It leads to “one way question” all the time in class. In other words, only teachers give out the question and learners just wait for the answer. And when they are asked to make questions, their response questions usually carry practicing characteristic.

Secondly, when discussing and presenting ideas before their group or the whole class, learners’ ideas are all prepared beforehand which lack of quick reaction in communication. Even when teachers encourage debate or discussion, the conflict or discussion still occupy with very small percentage of the time. That is because of harmony characteristic of Vietnamese. As it result, Vietnamese people tend to concede to others and “try to avoid disagreement to the extent that they may express agreement while privately disagreeing” (Brick & Louie, 1984: 53). Besides that, the reason for conflict avoidance also is the fear of losing face. Because when people feel that they have been shamed or lost face, they may “react impassively and withdraw from the situation or relationship” (pp. 53).

Finally, with the “suspicious of creativity” (Ellis, 1995: 10), both teachers and learners feel more comfortable when teaching and learning strictly base on textbook (with teachers are lesson plans). They prefer the concrete-sequential and linear manner. All improvisation or variations which out of preparation are not highly evaluated from both sides. This create a tedious or repetition and also create no motivation for teachers and learners.

Hofstede (1991) shows that “one of the reasons why so many solutions do not work or cannot be implemented is that differences in thinking among the partner have been ignored”.

Therefore, with the Vietnamese learners, they should show their willingness to make any necessary changing to adapt new way of learning to take them closer to the new language as the same as new culture.

With the teachers, in order to have a better result in teaching, they should have an open-minded to realize what they should apply or what they should adjust in teaching. Firstly, teacher should realize the obstacles, needs and abilities of learners, and accept their learning styles and find the way to help them develop the suitable learning strategies. Base on learners learning styles to readjust teachers' teaching methods and techniques. Teachers can ask students about their favourite ways of learning, what assistance they need from their teachers or let them write diaries (for days, weeks, or months) about what they like and what they dislike, or what they thinking about English periods. In this way, teachers always can update with their learners' information. Secondly, when having enough data about their students, teachers try to alter teaching style to create the matching for both students and teachers. When learners are provided with a variety of learning activities to meet the needs of each student, then all students will have at least some activities that appeal to meet their needs and ability. They are more likely to successful in those activities. Thirdly, teachers should create a friendly and trustful environment to facilitate learners to a feeling that "teachers as a member of their family" as Vietnamese learners are very open when they think their teachers and themselves both in one group with the same interest. Teachers should not let students think that "all teachers are outsiders to the cultures of their students" (Holliday, 1994). The comfort and trustfulness are crucial psychology and cultural factors in learning and teaching English.

III. CONCLUSION

To conclude, this paper focused on the cultural features of Vietnamese people such as the shyness and reserve characteristic, saving face, conflict avoidance and suspicious of creativity which have influence on teaching and learning English. Sometimes, such differences on culture are not easy to realize immediately which leads to misunderstanding or misjudgment. Consequently, these differences can reduce the effectiveness of learning and teaching activity. Therefore, both learners and teachers should be aware of these distinctive features to help themselves overcome cultural barriers in learning and teaching process with the best achievement.

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